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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000218

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: VYACHORKA AND SIVCHIK ARRESTED, STILL MISSING

Ref: A. MINSK 216

QB. LANE/GEE EMAIL 2/14/2007

Summary

1. (C) Belarusian security forces on March 13 arrested Belarusian National Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka and opposition activist Vyacheslav Sivchik and kept them overnight at an undisclosed location. Relatives, colleagues, and DCM and Poloff waited hours at the Sovetskiy courthouse to learn more about the activists' whereabouts, condition, court hearing. However, the authorities remained silent and court proceedings did not begin. Opposition activists and reporters viewed Vyachorka's and Sivchik's arrests as part of the authorities' attempts to disrupt preparations for the opposition's March 25 demonstration. End summary.

GOB Detains Two Important Activists Long After the "Crime"

2. (SBU) On March 13, plainclothesmen arrested Belarusian National Front (BPF) head Vintsuk Vyachorka and opposition activist Vyacheslav Sivchik. BPF deputy chair Ales Yanukevich on March 14 explained to Poloff that during a Malady Front meeting at BPF headquarters, BPF staff noticed law enforcement personnel in plain clothes watching the entrance. Suspecting that someone was about to be detained, Vyachorka and Yanukevich slipped out the back door and left in the latter's car. At 22:00 that evening, plainclothesmen arrested Vyachorka at the entrance of his home and took him to an undisclosed location. His family's efforts to find Vyachorka at various police stations failed.

3. (C) Security services arrested Sivchik at the Yakub Kolas metro station at 20:20 on March 13 on the grounds that he resembled someone wanted for robbery. According to Sivchik's stepbrother, Konstantin Lukashov, Sivchik was taken to the Sovetskiy district police station for questioning and then sent to the Okryestina detention center in Minsk. Sivchik's mother and OSCE representatives went to the detention facility but were told to contact the Minsk City press office for information. When contacted, the press office claimed to know nothing of the arrest and referred them back to Okryestina. The detention facility did not answer their phone and eventually turned it off.

Vyachorka and Sivchik a No Show at Court

4. (C) Colleagues and relatives expected court proceedings to begin the next day on March 14 at the Sovetskiy district court. However, by 16:30 the judges had not received any

information on the case and Vyachorka and Sivchik were still missing. Human rights lawyers Vladimir Lobkovich and Valentin Stefanovich told us that authorities were not giving basic information about the detentions. Specifically, nobody knew where the opposition activists were being held or on what charges. In addition to DCM and Poloff Q- who were thanked by Sivchik's mother and others for attending Q United Civic Party leader Anatoliy Lebedko and his deputy Igor Shinkarik, jailed presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin's lawyer Igor Rynkevich, the Swedish Charge and the OSCE office were present. De facto coalition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich attended in the morning.

¶5. (C) Lobkovich and Stephanovich predicted that Vyachorka and Sivchik were likely arrested for their March 12 speeches at the entrepreneur rally (reftel) in which they asked people to participate in the March 25 demonstration. If convicted they could face up to 25 days in jail, preventing them from further preparing and participating in the March 25 demonstration.

Comment

¶6. (C) Vyachorka's and Sivchik's arrests expose the GOB's absolute lack of due process. Opposition activists have recently warned poloffs that the GOB would begin arresting political leaders, organizers, and youth activists to ensure that they do not participate in the March 25 demonstration. Arresting Vyachorka, the lead organizer, and Sivchik, the lead recruiter, is a significant move and we expect similar arrests in the days leading up to March ¶25. Post will provide further reporting on the arrests.

MINSK 00000218 002 OF 002

Stewart